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☆ allegiances ☆

[image]

❦ **G A L E C L A N** ❦
- clan of the lost and found -

Leader 》adderstar
black she-cat with thick fur and yellow eyes.

Deputy 》windfeather
fluffy gray tabby tom with green eyes.

Medicine Cats 》

asterface
long-furred white she-cat with ginger tabby dapples on her tail and face, copper eyes. very old.

hillflight
soft-furred light brown tabby tom with dark copper eyes. long-legged.

Warriors 》

blacksnout
scruffy black she-cat with a scarred muzzle, amber eyes.

grassfoot
pale brown tabby tom with green eyes.
》 yellowpaw

harewhisker
fluffy white-and-brown she-cat with long, noticeable whiskers. hazel eyes.

windfur
thin-bodied white tom with hazel eyes.
》 birdpaw

cloudface

brown tabby she-cat with white markings and a primarily white face. green eyes.
》 bunnypaw

birdrunner
agile black-and-white tom. copper eyes.

sheeptail
long-furred white tom with a docked tail from an incident as an apprentice. green eyes.

dewfoot
blue-gray tom with yellow eyes and a twisted paw.
》 amberpaw

daisywing
sleek brown-and-cream tortoiseshell with white paws and chest. amber eyes. long legs and ears.

coyotegaze
thin pale brown tabby she-cat with long legs. distinct green eyes.

clovermask
black-and-white she-cat with a mostly black face. yellow eyes.
》 swiftpaw

furzestripe
ginger tabby she-cat with green eyes.

Apprentices 》

yellowpaw
golden tabby she-cat with hazel eyes.

birdpaw
lithe russet tom with darker speckles, green eyes.

bunnypaw
fluffy white tom with short legs. copper eyes.

amberpaw
russet tabby she-cat with hazel eyes.

swiftpaw
long-legged black she-cat. amber eyes.

Queens 》

kestrelwing
gray-and-ginger tortoiseshell with copper eyes.
》 nursing dewfoot's kits; ashkit, stonekit and birchkit

deerheart
light brown she-cat with darker spots. hazel eyes.
》 expecting birdrunner's kits

mousetooth
brown tabby she-cat with green eyes, long teeth. camp-queen.

Kits 》

ashkit
gray-and-ginger tortoiseshell she-kit with yellow eyes.

stonekit
blue-gray tomkit with copper eyes.

birchkit
cream tabby she-kit with copper eyes.

Elders 》

littlefang
small black tom with white spotting up to shoulders. long teeth, hazel eyes.

squirrelblaze
elderly ginger tabby she-cat with white paws and belly. tired copper eyes.

☆ prologue ☆

[image]

PROLOGUE

❦

Adderstar blinked awake to a vast, foggy field stretching out at all sides. She took a couple hesitant steps forward, taking deep breaths but picking up no scent. She recognized this place. It was the territory of StarClan.

The mist gathering at her paws dampened the leader's black pelt as she stilled in the field, her gaze scanning the surrounding land then settling on the sky. It was strange and starless, a detail that sent a shiver down her spine.

Suddenly, Adderstar's gaze turned and locked on an approaching figure.

The cat's body was slightly transparent, and it didn't disturb the long grass as it walked. Its outline glimmered faintly, and starry mist followed every step. The cat paused a few tail-lengths from Adderstar, its star-filled eyes showing great power. But Adderstar wasn't frightened, for this cat was the former leader, Pinestar.

"Hello, Adderstar." Pinestar meowed softly. Her voice was quiet and hardly carried to the leader's ears, yet the words still made her shudder.

Adderstar flicked her ear and dipped her head in respect for the former leader of GaleClan. She twitched her whiskers and for a moment both cats stood across from each other, neither moving, the only sound the faint, distant chirping of crickets and Adderstar's breathing.

"Why have you called for me?" Adderstar finally asked after what seemed like an eternity. Though she was not scared of Pinestar or

StarClan, something about the ethereal realm always made her somewhat nervous and yet at peace.

"I have a message for you," Pinestar spoke delicately, not a single falter in her tone.

"Beware the deadly flower with thorns sharper than a coyote's maw."

With that, the mighty spirit began to fade. But this didn't concern Adderstar, StarClan cats always faded once their message was delivered. But she hadn't a heartbeat to ponder before she began to feel light-headed like she would drift away and off the ground.

Adderstar felt her blood run cold as the world began to twist and spin and whirl around her in a storm of light and shadow. She unsheathed her claws and parted her jaws in a yowl, but no sound was released. In fact, the world was completely silent, despite the terrifying scene.

Adderstar could see two hazy, blurry figures appear for a moment, and saw a flash of blood-red across her vision. A great screech echoed through her ears and rumbled the ground, as though the very earth was yowling.

Then, she was awake, jolting her head up so fast it left a pain in her neck. Adderstar drew in long, ragged breaths, clawing at her moss nest as she tried to calm herself.

After a few minutes of panic and confusion, Adderstar regained her grip on reality and settled back into her nest. But she still shifted uncomfortably and trembled lightly as she repeated Pinestar's words over and over again in her mind.

Beware the deadly flower with thorns sharper than a coyote's maw.

☆ chapter one ☆

CHAPTER 1

C***oyotes And Claws***

❦

The sun bore down relentlessly on GaleClan's valley. The soft, tall, lush grass swayed gently in the breeze, dappled by faint shadows of the fluffy clouds high above.

Among the fronds, the hills dipped down into a small hollow, one side bordered by a short ledge. A huge, fat oak tree perched on the edge and wildflowers spouted just outside, circling the hollow.

Cats moved to-and-fro, flattening the grass within the hollow. Some were settled down to eat, others chatting in small clusters, and still some coming and going.

GaleClan camp.

Sitting neatly in the shadow of the oak tree and watching the clouds drift along in the light blue sky was a ginger tabby, Furzestripe.

Furzestripe was different. She always had been. She was submissive and soft-spoken, following orders blindly. But she had a reason. Her parents always told stories of evil, ruthless beasts called *vagabonds*. They were cats who roamed the valley freely, living a life of bloodshed and dismay.

Furzestripe was horrified of such a lifestyle.

"Furzestripe! Patrol." She was snapped from cloud-watching when a voice called for her.

Furzestripe looked down from the sky to see Blacksnout, standing at the grassy entrance to camp. Furzestripe rose to her paws and hurried over, tail flicking as she passed by her Clanmates.

Furzestripe twitched her whiskers as she neared them. Windfur and Birdrunner were also standing there, waiting for her.

As soon as the golden she-cat was next to Windfur, Blacksnout turned and led the way through the arching grass.

Furzestripe eased at the comforting smell of wildflowers. Her gaze travelled over the grass as it rippled like water. She continued to look around as she followed Birdrunner, the patrol padding up the slope behind camp.

She set her eyes on the shady pine forest, far behind them. GaleClan didn't set foot down there. A twolegplace lay close beyond it, and she could just make out the unnaturally smooth dens and acrid-smelling thunderpaths from the hill.

Then Birdrunner halted, and she turned her focus back to the patrol. She hadn't noticed how far they walked while she was looking around, for they now stood on a hill where the grass arched above their heads, and on one side the land fell away to form a steep slope. Boulders jutted from the earth near the bottom. Any cat who fell down would be lucky to escape alive.

Furzestripe, realizing the panicked air that had formed around the patrol, raised her head and sniffed the air. Her blood ran cold at the unmistakable scent.

Coyote.

Just moments later the creature made itself shown, prowling from the tall grass and baring its teeth. The coyote angled its ears back next, growling at the patrol.

Blacksnout snarled back, jumping to the side to avoid a quick bite. The coyote barked to try and threaten the strangers, but only Windfur and Blacksnout backed up.

"Birdrunner, Furzestripe! Keep it here. Windfur and I will get backup." Blacksnout ordered, before her and the lithe white tom turned and bounded off through the tall grass.

Furzestripe just stared the coyote in the eyes, shaking, but

Birdrunner growled lowly and sprang forward. He clung to the coyote's back, scratching and biting. Startled, the coyote backed up and whipped its head, barking and snarling as it tried to get a hold on him.

Furzestripe's heart sped up when she noticed both were nearing the hill's edge. The coyote growled and swung its body, Birdrunner losing his grip and sliding down its flank.

Furzestripe rushed forward to try and grab him, but she was too late. She and the coyote stood still for a few moments as the she-cat watched her Clanmate go down, down, down...

CRACK.

The sickening noise rang out as Birdrunner's skull slammed against a boulder. He fell limp, tumbling down to the very bottom of the hill, laying still.

Furzestripe glanced back to the coyote, and it met her eyes before backing up, snarling before it spun around and ran off.

Furzestripe then turned her eyes back to Birdrunner's body. She slowly made her way down the hill, ears pressed back. The world seemed far too silent now, as though even the insects were too shocked to make a sound.

Once reaching the stretch of tall grass at the bottom, she examined Birdrunner's corpse. She began to breath heavily as she saw his head, cracked open and split like the shell of a nut. Blood seeped out and turned his fur dark red, sticking to his forehead as though he had fallen into the river.

Birdrunner's gaze was wide and unblinking, his jaws gaped in a yowl that would never be heard. Furzestripe backed up, closing and reopening her eyes rapidly, hoping that the body would disappear and she'd see him back on the top of the slope, chasing the coyote away.

But the corpse was still there every time. Furzestripe's breath caught in her throat at the morbid sight before her, giving up on making it

leave. She gagged, turning away and clenching her teeth to hold back the vomit in her throat. Furzestripe forced herself to swallow, breathing loudly. Blood roared in her ears and she only faintly heard the grass rustling as the rest of the patrol returned.

She stared with huge eyes at Blacksnout as the other she-cat came to a halt beside her. Furzestripe raked her eyes along her living Clanmate, scanning every strand of fur and trying to forget the horrific vision of Birdrunner.

"What... what happened?" Blacksnout's voice was breathy and nearly silent. Furzestripe's mind began to race.

If I tell them I couldn't catch him, they'll think I'm weak. I'll be thrown out because I'm not strong and fast and I'll become a- a vagabond *and I'll die and-*

"The coyote chased him down." Furzestripe murmured, her tone shaky and quiet.

I lied.

She tried to ignore her own words, instead just waiting for any sort of response.

"...Alright. Cloudface, help me carry him back. Windfur, make sure the coyote's gone." Blacksnout turned to face the others, all holding the same horrified expression.

As soon as her words were out, though, they hurried to follow. Cloudface and Blacksnout lifted Birdrunner onto their shoulders, Windfur scampering up the slope to check if the coyote had truly fled. Furzestripe just stood still, slowly calming. Her heart pounded and she nearly leapt out of her fur when Sheeptail's long fur brushed against her.

"It'll be okay. GaleClan has plenty of strong, brave warriors." he spoke gently. Furzestripe just nodded slowly, padding to follow Blacksnout and Cloudface. The fluffy, short-tailed tom trotted close behind her.

The four cats moved silently back to camp. Windfur rejoined them

quickly, saying the coyote was gone before the group became quiet again. They reached camp and set the body down slowly, telling how he died before settling down to mourn.

While everyone else gathered at the corpse's side to pay their respect, Furzestripe instead moved to sit at the bottom of the ledge overlooking camp. She watched the ceremony, the sunny blue sky and swaying grass seeming much more grim now that a dead body was in the middle of camp.

As her eyes trailed over the grieving cats, she noticed that Deerheart looked especially sad. Furzestripe suddenly remembered that the queen had been expecting Birdrunner's kits. She felt her blood run cold again

What have I done?

☆ chapter two ☆

CHAPTER 2

"I'm fine."

❦

Though the day was perfect - grass swaying, gentle breezes, warm weather - Furzestripe couldn't focus on anything but her own fear.

She had already missed two mice and an old blackbird, and was now watching a rabbit.

The soft-furred creature nibbled away at the fronds. Furzestripe's pelt rippled and she ducked low, prowling forward. But while she approached her mind began to wander.

What if somebody knows? What if they're telling Adderstar right now, and I'll be thrown out for lying and being responsible for a Clanmate's death?

The horrific image of Birdrunner's split skull distracted the she-cat, and she crunched a dead bit of plant beneath her paw. Realizing it was being followed, the rabbit flicked its ears around then tore away through the grass, soon lost among the arching growth.

Furzestripe muttered a curse and padded on. She *had* to catch something. If she went back to camp empty-pawed, the Clan would be disappointed beyond repair.

She couldn't disappoint them. Cats who disappointed the Clan... they were useless. If someone was unable to hunt, to fight, to protect everyone else properly, then they'd get thrown out.

They'd become a *vagabond*.

Furzestripe only jolted from her thoughts when she caught the smell of Sheeptail and Grassfoot.

She looked up from the ground to see the two toms lounging around in the sun and grooming. The she-cat was about to turn away when Sheeptail looked up and saw her.

"Hello Furzestripe!" He greeted with a friendly trill, "How're you doing?"

Realizing she couldn't leave, the golden warrior took a deep breath and settled onto her belly to face the two.

"I'm fine."

"Were you hunting?" Asked Sheeptail, eyes warm and tail flicking on the ground.

Furzestripe nodded, "But I guess the prey wasn't running well today, couldn't catch anything."

Grassfoot paused his lapping at the base of his tail and tilted his head up to look at her, ears twitching at the slight breeze.

"Really? Everything seemed just fine to me." He blinked.

Furzestripe felt her blood run cold and quickly replied, "I don't know, maybe it was just where I was hunting." She then rose to her paws, "If you don't mind, I must go." Before quickly padding away through the tall fronds.

The golden feline, once out of sight from her Clanmates, changed her slow pace to a lopsided run. She cared little for her paw placement and tumbled over the slopes and grasses, breath heavy.

Furzestripe had to run. *They know I was lying. They know the prey's fine. They know. They know. They know.*

Panting and mottled, she soon found herself standing in the thicker part of the groves.

The she-cat whipped her tail back-and-forth, pacing around in

circles in a tiny hollow within the coniferous grove.

She closed her eyes to try and calm herself, but she was met by the morbid image of Birdrunner's corpse in all its gory detail. Furzestripe's breath caught in her throat and she blinked again, but the memory was there every time.

Furzestripe whined, shaking her head so hard she almost toppled over.

Please, please, let me forget that... please... "Please StarClan, please, I don't want to see it, please..." Her mental begging soon turned to jumbled dialogue as she continued her pacing and shaking.

"Furzestripe?"

She froze in place when she heard her name be called. Head snapping up, she met Dewfoot's gaze. He appeared concerned, a robin held tightly in his jaws.

"Are you alright..?" The tom's eyes slowly travelled from her face to the rest of her body, where her fur was a spiky mess.

Furzestripe nodded vigorously. The two continued to stare at each other for a few moments before Dewfoot backed away and left through the bushes.

Immediately the golden she-cat ducked her head and released a shaky sigh. *Nobody knows, birdbrain. Nobody knows. Nobody will know. You're fine. Fine. Fine.*

Furzestripe took a few deep breaths then shakily left the grove, making sure she wouldn't run into Dewfoot again, and padded up into the grassy hills once more.

She grumbled incoherent words to herself, loosely forming one sentence over and over again.

"I'm fine."

- ☆ -

right, i know that was short. i meant to publish this yesterday but i was out for a while.